

Andover Master Plan

Visioning & Goal Statements

Nov 9, 2022

1. Town Fiscal Summary

Strong Fiscal Performance

Andover has maintained a AAA/Aa1 bond rating for more than a decade and maintains a stable outlook regarding debt management and tax revenues. The Town's long standing AAA/Aa1 bond rating, according to S&P¹, is attributable to the Town's strong economy, financial management, budgetary flexibility, liquidity, and its strong debt and contingent liabilities profile: roughly 68% of the Town's debt is scheduled to be repaid over the next ten years and the town's debt service fund is 4.7% of the total governmental fund expenditures – the town limits debt service in any one year to 10% of budgeted general expenditures. Additionally, in 2021 the town secured a pension obligation bond to fund the Town's OBEP obligations to 90% – yielding a total savings of \$142 million². Andover's economic performance is due to its location in the Boston-Cambridge-Newton, Mass-N.H. metropolitan statistical area which captures a broad and diverse range of large employers and high earning residents.

An Opportunity to Finance Smart Growth

Andover is in a good financial position to take on strategic debt in order to finance critical changes in the town that promote future growth. While strongly suited to take on additional debt, managing it will require growing and diversifying the Town's tax base to ensure tax revenues continue to support Andover's growth, maintenance, and its strong bond rating. Pursuing tax base growth should be a pertinent town strategy as property tax revenues comprise 75% of the town's general fund revenue. A diversified and overall larger tax base can be captured through zoning changes and densification of certain areas of the town, as well as through making key investments that can ensure long-term liveability and support a greater diversity of who can live and work in Andover.

Overall, the town's fiscal health presents an opportunity to envision a growth strategy that acknowledges the connection between the town's urban form and the revenue it's able to capture from it. Such a strategy would allow for the financing of capital investments in key facilities such as schools, public realm enhancements, housing, schools, and substantial transit and mobility upgrades to serve many generations of residents and businesses to come.

¹ <https://andoverma.gov/Archive.aspx?ADID=1433>

² https://www.andovertownsmen.com/news/pension-obligation-bond-to-save-town-millions/article_37ff2aee-5918-11ec-9bc7-93a5099852d5.html

2. Vision Statement

As Andover continues into the coming years, it will be an even more vibrant town that will work to even better appeal to a wide range of people and lifestyles. Andover will preserve aspects of its historic neighborhoods and create new denser walkable communities where residents have many of their needs met within a fifteen minute walk. The town will balance these different areas by integrating transit-oriented development and cultivating a diverse economy throughout the town – while preserving a dense connected network of open space and active recreational resources that give Andover its attractive and defining character today. Its growth is driven by economic, social, and environmentally sustainable principles, and by intentional and smart strategic choices.

3. 2022 Master Plan Goals & Recommendations

1. Housing

1. Diversify Housing Opportunities:

Create housing opportunities for seniors and empty nesters to age in place, and for young families and single working professionals to find homes for themselves.

1. Make accessory dwelling units through the special permit process throughout all single family zones / existing residences.
2. In addition to encouraging the production of more affordable housing through inclusionary housing policies, encourage all new development over 20,000 square feet to have set aside affordable units for creative economy workers and other young professionals.
3. Identify large contiguous parcels that could support a master planned development to house mixed income professionals in the Boston Metro Area in a walkable urban environment.
4. Allow multi-family / co-housing use of some existing single-family residential buildings (conversion and shared facilities).

2. Balance Town Character:

Balance the rural character of the town with newer development patterns by creating more strategically located, dense mixed use areas to attract residents of different walks of life (ages, professional background, familial structure, etc.).

1. Create development guidelines and zoning bylaws that require universal, accessible, and contextual design in all new development.
2. Strive to create more socioeconomic diversity by identifying critical housing and demographic gaps and providing affordable housing options.
3. Create neighborhoods that support the local food system by helping people integrate the growing of edible foods in their immediate environment and allowing for accessible access to gathering areas for folks to share.

3. Transit Oriented Development:

Develop transit-oriented communities in Andover for all generations, to promote more equitable and livable neighborhoods throughout the town.

1. Encourage neighborhood development, including higher allowed density and a larger mix of commercial and residential uses, in areas of the town near existing density, whether proximity to downtown or proximity to other existing multifamily housing.
2. Encourage additional development, including higher allowed density and a larger mix of commercial and residential uses, in areas of the town near commuter rail stations.
3. Limit the expansion of luxury housing in the town by a balanced mix of market rate and affordable unit mixes in all new projects.

4. Green Development:

Require green building best practices in new commercial and residential construction to meet state-led goals of 80% greenhouse gas reduction by 2050.

1. Require green energy efficiency and electrification upgrades in existing buildings, in conjunction with requests to permit other upgrades or improvements and ensure all new developments align to the Massachusetts Building Energy Codes including the Stretch Code.
2. Require new development to implement environmentally progressive approaches into all landscape design and building construction (such as: passive house, LEED, Well, or SITES certifications) that incorporate green infrastructure to the extent possible in parking lots, building rooftops, streetscapes, and street tree plantings.
3. Establish a municipal residential compost system and establish a monitoring program to test municipal compost for soil life, plant pathogens, and other harmful materials to ensure a healthy and useful product. Analyze the impact on municipal cost by comparing composting implementation to likely offset from reduced trash disposal.
4. Support improved access to lower-carbon modes of transportation by enhancing and adding sidewalks connecting new development to nearby amenities.

5. Enhance Historic Character:

Adopt an economic development strategy that contemplates the adaptive reuse of areas with historic importance and envisions thriving historic districts that generate revenue for the town such as the Shawsheen and Ballardvale areas.

1. Identify key opportunities within the districts and properties on the Massachusetts Historic Register to restore and or renovate using Historic Tax Credits.
2. Create a branding package for the town's various historic districts to help make visitors aware of the town's history with wayfinding and merchandise.
3. Prioritize historic preservation and adaptive reuse of historic buildings to revitalize and activate Andover's history by pursuing historic designation for buildings without any and potential historical districts where there are none and enforce design guidelines that permit the evolution of historic character through building and site renovation.

6. Housing for Future Generations:

Allow for younger generations to see Andover as a place for them to stay, live, and thrive.

1. Prioritize housing production that attracts younger residents to live, work, and stay in Andover.
2. Develop plan for the town to help create opportunities for younger (and young professional) Andover residents to find affordable housing and community in Andover through permitting co-operative housing in existing single family homes, micro unit housing, one-bedrooms, and studios in new development near Shawsheen and Ballardvale and for all infill development in downtown and Town office parks.
3. Incentivize town participation in construction projects by partnering with vocational schools to provide hands-on training for young adults and students to connect with local developers and contractors to gain housing development and building construction experience.

2. Urban Form & Land Use

1. Targeted Growth & Enhancement:

Create more development opportunities with reduced (and where possible eliminated) parking requirements in the town that will grow the town's economy, while allowing the town's appeal and character to evolve with new growth through development review and design guidelines that accommodate the design of different densities, commercial zones and corridors, to attract new residents who already commute to Andover, which will diversify the town's tax base.

1. Increase minimum allowable FAR and height requirements of existing mixed use (residential with ground-floor commercial), commercial, and industrial zones to promote denser development.
2. Pursue a town growth analysis to forecast different growth/density scenarios, to predict, manage, and plan for growth impact before it happens
3. Strive to create neighborhoods that combat sprawl by adapting the concept of the fifteen minute walk-zone to Andover.
4. Encourage a variety of residential choices and styles designed to withstand the economic and demographic tests of time to be developed in Andover.
5. Pursue regional development opportunities by inviting neighboring municipalities to identify cross-municipal development opportunities.

2. Commercial & Industrial Districts:

Secure a strong industrial and commercial tax base by encouraging a robust economic plan to retrofit and densify existing industrial and commercial office parks into thriving mixed use districts, and promote the creation and retention of new small businesses by ensuring sufficient consumer density and improved walkability throughout all of downtown.

1. Identify areas downtown that can be redeveloped into entertainment venues, spaces for attractive nightlife, and a range of affordable to boutique retail shops in close proximity to each other.

2. Create the opportunity for small local businesses and neighborhood businesses to be added to existing family zones by allowing accessory commercial units through the special permit process.
3. Eliminate new single story commercial development of retail and commercial chains and encourage contextual mid rise development in existing areas across the Town with contextual height limits.
4. Identify and encourage development opportunities to creatively and adaptively reuse existing sound building stock in the historical and industrial sections of the town and attract developers' participation through pursuing redevelopment tax credits that town can utilize.

3. Arts, Culture, & Innovation:

Enhance the public realm experience of the town through placemaking, urban design, and public art in quality gathering and multi-use spaces for Andover Residents and Visitors of all ages.

1. Create a town-wide placemaking and wayfinding plan to highlight and emphasize cultural/ecological heritage destinations.
2. Support public art and employ seasonal art installations to activate and draw attention to various parts of the town.

4. Invest in Retirees & Seniors:

Allow for residents to age-in place and have a vibrant life while providing opportunities for cross-generational connection.

1. Develop accessible senior housing in areas where residents have access to quality open space and services appropriate to their needs.
2. Invest in affordable homeownership opportunities for retirees and seniors and build walkable communities around them.

5. Preserve Agricultural & Ecological Heritage:

Preserve key farmland and create a network of community gardens (both ornamental and productive).

1. Work with landscape architects, educational, and community organizations on devising a restoration plan for small to large-scale communal agricultural activity and pursue a collective land ownership and operation model.
2. Create a community garden plan that identifies various areas around the town that can be converted or added to a network of gardens with sufficient branding & wayfinding for pedestrians and visitors to tour the town's gardens. When possible, encourage denser parts of town to include spaces for community gardens and/or urban farms, to ensure that agricultural character finds its way into developed parts of Andover.
3. Promote professional/volunteer opportunities and school participation for town residents to be involved in the stewardship and maintenance of the network of gardens.
4. Conduct a feasibility analysis to encourage more local / backyard food production (chickens, goats, fish, bees, farms) in ways that reduce negative health impacts through the revising town bylaws and recommendations from the Health and Conservation Department.
5. Explore the use of the Shawsheen and Merrimack Rivers as a food source (fish, shad, etc.).

3. Natural Environment

1. Regional Ecology:

Incorporate native plantings into the downtown, office park infill, Ballardvale, and Shawsheen, so that new development is connected to Andover's pastoral and ecological history.

1. Invest in novel and innovative strategies for incorporating regional ecology into new development through green and sustainable design guidelines and zoning.
2. Develop a plan to revitalize native plantings, limit invasive species encroachment, and maintain a biodiverse urban environment and promote an education campaign regarding edible plants within Andover.
3. Incentivize developers and homeowners to utilize native and non-invasive plants in new and on existing development.
4. Maintain Andover's high quality soil by enforcing soil regeneration and protection on public and private property.

2. Protect Open Space:

Pursuant to the goals established in the 2018 Open Space Plan, the Town of Andover should work with AVIS to realize plans of creating the Shawsheen Greenway, promote local land stewardship, and plan for future open space needs.

1. By 2025 complete the necessary steps to acquire additional open space to begin planning for appropriate wildlife corridors and active recreational connections along the Shawsheen.
2. Create a workforce program, such as Groundwork Lawrence's Green Team, to employ local residents in the active management of the town's natural resources and provide opportunities for students to participate.
3. Reduce and or limit the use of harmful pesticides, materials, chemicals, and artificial turf in all existing and new development.
4. Pursue the creation of a Town Tree Removal/Replacement bylaw for new development and enforce the Town Tree By-law Committee to promote the long-term success of town tree infrastructure.
5. Require new development to maintain or enhance tree canopy across all non-developed square footage.
6. Employ a dark skies ordinance in addition to other innovative methods of reducing light pollution while still creating a navigable walkable urban environment.

3. Connected Open Space:

Add connections to the town's open space network to create an interconnected greenway featuring transit, bike, and trail infrastructure.

1. Identify street routes that connect residents to open space from critical residential and commercial areas, and convert them into multi-modal, or where possible, exclusively pedestrian and bike thoroughfares.

2. Determine key parcels for acquisition that can be converted and or added to a town-wide connected greenway.

4. Showcase the Rivers:

Make the Shawsheen River a destination and improve its health and ecological conditions.

1. Make the Shawsheen and Merrimack Rivers into more notable town features, complete with recreational activities, public programming, and ensure the preservation of its natural ecology and riverine health.
2. Review parcel ownership along the rivers and work with owners and stakeholders to make the river more publicly accessible.
3. Support the goals and recommendations of the Shawsheen Master Plan (still in progress!) – particularly as it relates to enhancing active recreation along the river.

5. Accessible Open Space:

Make recreational open space accessible to all residents and those with disabilities.

1. Identify areas with low access to open spaces and create a strategy for connection that prioritizes walkability/bikeability.
2. Identify open spaces that lack pedestrian and or bike access and target investment into enhancing public infrastructure in and around them.
3. Prioritize open space connections for those with disabilities.

4. Mobility & Transportation

1. Transit Connectivity:

Connect residents to active commercial spaces as well as to the commuter rail by providing various station access points from different portions of the town.

1. Identify key opportunities for continuous multimodal transit connections along the commuter rail corridor to key office parks and residential areas.
2. Create a multimodal transit access implementation plan, complete with a wayfinding strategy, to help connect commuter rail passengers to their place of work & the downtown.
3. Pilot bus shuttle services for various demographics in town: seniors, commuters, pedestrians, etc. to connect them to various town areas and resources.

2. Commuter Rail Enhancements:

Make Ballardvale and Andover Commuter Rail stations into high quality community assets and promote the creation of transit oriented development around them

1. Conduct a feasibility study on renovating/modernizing Ballardvale and Andover Stations.

2. Identify parcels where increased mixed-use density could form in proximity to the commuter rail and create a housing plan for commuters.
3. Make both stations sites for activity such as convenience commerce, performances, community gatherings, and or reading groups.

3. Pedestrian and Bike Infrastructure:

Connect all neighborhoods and key destinations in Andover through a safe pedestrian and bike network.

1. Require new development to include quality sidewalks and publicly accessible connections to existing abutting trail systems where the trails are not otherwise accessible from the public right-of-way.
2. Determine key areas to install amenities and improve existing pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure – taking into consideration where improvements are most needed according to usage and how they fit into a connected network.
3. Investigate innovative methods of weatherproofing certain aspects of the towns pedestrian and bike infrastructure to promote a year-round culture of utilizing the system.

4. Multimodal Mobility Solutions:

Pursue innovative infrastructure investments in parking solutions, such as a multipurpose municipal parking garage, revised parking ratios, and minimum and or eliminated parking requirements in specific parts of town.

1. Create a growth plan that determines the best location for and different levels of parking capacity needed to support different types of residential and commercial density in key areas of the town such as the office parks, commuter rail stations, and downtown.
2. Reduce parking minimums for new development and establish bicycle parking minimums and guidelines (e.g. rack style, spacing, accommodations, for cargo or accessible mobility devices).
3. Require long-term bicycle storage accommodations (indoor & secure room) for new apartment and condo complexes and office buildings.
4. Support and anticipate rideshare and ‘zip-car’ services to reduce the need for parking downtown as well as support travel from the office parks, and commuter rail stations to different commercial parts of town.

5. Green Transportation Innovation:

Prioritize green, climate, and or environmentally restorative methods of enhancing transportation infrastructure throughout the town to minimize the negative impacts that largescale transit systems have on local and regional ecology.

1. Add EV charging infrastructure to parking facilities across town-owned spaces as well as in town office parks and sites of dense employment.
2. Explore regulatory incentives to encourage building owners to retrofit EV charging stations at their own buildings, and to require some amount of EV charging capacity in new construction.

3. Invest in green infrastructure as part of a green and complete streets initiative when street improvements are made, including additional street trees and green stormwater management infrastructure (rain gardens and bioswales), and solar-powered illumination options.
4. Support the implementation of eco-friendly roads, paving solutions, and road maintenance and other innovative methods to reduce the negative impact road construction and maintenance has on the environment.
5. Investigate methods of incorporating nature into large scale transit infrastructure through functional landscaping and living infrastructure.
6. Bury and eliminate utility lines and utility poles.

5. Economy & Jobs

1. Entice Commuters:

Continue to attract larger employers who bring a greater commercial tax base and large employment opportunities to Andover, by creating places that encourage commuters to patronize local business, and ultimately relocate to Andover.

1. Pursue tax incentives to draw businesses attracting high wage jobs in STEM such as biotechnology, manufacturing, and technology and pursue a community benefits agreement that provides further enhancement of office development to create more extroverted and innovative office parks.
2. Invest in adding more cafes, co-working spaces, and dining options throughout the town to create opportunities for collaborators and entrepreneurs to gather and work together.
3. Promote livelier office parks for workers, by promoting a denser mixed use environment to support workers patronizing dining establishments and local food trucks for lunch, and enjoying the convenience of various town shops such as bookstores, florists, dry cleaners, and other local small businesses.

2. Downtown Employment Hub:

Encourage the downtown to become a hub for those employed in arts & culture, entertainment, retail, culinary, and boutique services.

1. Pursue tax incentives paired with community benefits (urban design and public realm enhancements) to encourage the growth of a vibrant arts and entertainment district in the downtown.
2. Utilize local talent and connections to create programming to help support local businesses and establishments and increase foot traffic downtown.

3. Diversify and Strengthen Andover's Economic Community:

Attract a more diverse range of industries and cultures to be represented in Andover to support a holistic economy of high paying jobs in science, technology, and health care, as well as more creative job clusters to support a creative class of individuals in Andover that can attract tourism and residents.

1. Conduct a business outreach plan to meet with large local employers to discuss various land improvements to support denser and walkable districts for commuters and residents to enjoy.

2. Create an initiative to target and attract diverse young and creative professionals to live, work, meet, and display their work in the town through the provision of affordable artist housing and professional workforce development programs.
3. Prioritize the recruitment and retention of restaurant operators and determine appropriate areas for craft breweries, distilleries, and or other types of similar boutique experiences.
4. Promote incubating smaller microbusinesses or attracting a microbusiness incubator to lease out small commercial spaces to local vendors.
5. Protect or enhance Andover's scientific, medical, industrial, and academic sectors.

4. Grow Green Initiatives in Businesses:

Reduce the reliance of Andover's businesses on fossil fuels and encourage environmentally friendly and sustainable practices among all Andover businesses

1. Conduct a townwide audit on business GHG emissions and sustainability practices.
2. Encourage and incentivize green manufacturing businesses to relocate to Andover.
3. Consider implementing a program for businesses to incentivize composting, similar to implementing a residential composting program.

5. Arts, Culture, and Innovation:

Prioritize arts, culture, and innovation as important aspects of inclusive economic development and placemaking

1. Create a workforce development program for creative workers, artists, artisans, performers, and designers that gives them access to affordable studio and or co-working space across the town and has them showcase their work throughout the town to staff public art and seasonal art initiatives in the town.
2. Partner with local schools on creating internship opportunities for students in Andover to connect with local businesses, small-scale and craft manufacturers, and other artisanal workers.
3. Create a public art policy and program to determine what should be considered works of art vs signage and advertising.
4. Create a certification program for artists to gain access to artist-focused subsidized housing and amenities in the town.